

Message Text

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70

ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AGR-20 SPC-03 AID-20 EB-11 NSC-07

RSC-01 CIEP-02 TRSE-00 SS-20 STR-08 OMB-01 CEA-02

CIAE-00 COME-00 FRB-02 INR-10 NSAE-00 XMB-07 OPIC-12

LAB-06 SIL-01 SWF-02 H-03 L-03 DODE-00 PA-04 USIA-15

PRS-01 DRC-01 /177 W

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FM AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7853

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CINCPAC

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MELBOURNE FOR MCHALE

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EO 11652: NA

TAGS: ELBA, PINT, NZ

SUBJECT: MONTH FOR INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS IN WELLINGTON AREA
FREEZING WORKS

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. MARCH WAS MONTH OF MAJOR INDUSTRIAL
UNREST IN WELLINGTON DISTRICT FREEZING WORKS (MEAT
PACKING PLANTS). STRIKES AND LOCKOUTS WERE REGULAR
OCCURENCES WITH NEITHER LABOR NOR MANAGEMENT SHOWING MUCH
INTEREST IN SERIOUS NEGOTIATIONS. AT MIN LABOR CALLED
MEETING MARCH 28 FREEZING WORKERS AND MANAGEMENT AGREED
TO GO BACK TO WORK APRIL 1. SERIOUS PROBLEMS REMAIN
AND THE AGREEMENT IS LIKELY TO COME APART AT THE SEAMS
AT THE LEAST PROVOCATION. GNZ, HIGHLY DEPEDENT ON
MEAT EXPORTS FOR FOREIGN EXCHANGE EARNINGS AND EQUALLY
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DEPDEDENT ON THE TRADE UNIONS FOR POLITICAL SUPPORT,

FINDS ITSELF BETWEEN THE PROVERBIAL ROCK AND HARD SPOT. END SUMMARY.

2. LACK OF EFFECTIVE INDUSTRIAL GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES IN NZ DEMONSTRATED BEYOND NECESSITY DURING MARCH AS WELLINGTON DISTRICT FREEZING WORKERS STRUCK OVER FIRINGS AND WORKING CONDITIONS, AND MANAGEMENT RETALIATED WITH LOCKOUTS. ESTIMATES ARE THAT MAN-DAYS LOST AMOUNTED TO 25 PERCENT OF POSSIBLE WORK TIME. FOCAL POINT OF UNREST WAS GEAR MEAT WORKS WHICH HAS HAD LONG HISTORY OF REASONABLY GOOD INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS IN INDUSTRY NOTED FOR HIGH INCIDENCE OF WILCAT STRIKES.

3. PRIME MOVER FOR UNION HAS BEEN FREEZING WORKERS WELLINGTON BRANCH SECRETARY R G MIDDLEMASS. MILITANT NZ TRADE UNIONISTS DESCRIBE MIDDLEMASS AS "BLOODY RADICAL". MANAGEMENT AND GNZ OFFICIALS PRIVATELY LESS FLATTERING IN THEIR DESCRIPTIONS. MIDDLEMASS THOROUGHLY DEDICATED TO CLASS STRUGGLE CONCEPT INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND, DESPITE AGREEMENT TO ABIDE BY GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES, IS UNLIKELY ATTEMPT RESOLVE PROBLEMS QUIETLY IF HE FEELS RESULTS CAN BE OBTAINED BY CALLING STRIKE. MIDDLEMASS APPEARS TO BE IN FIRM CONTROL WELLINGTON BRANCH BUT IS UNDER SOME PRESSURE FROM HIS OWN NATIONAL UNION AND FEDERATION OF LABOUR (FOL). LATTER ORGANIZATIONS, HOWEVER, WEDDED TO CONCEPT LOCAL AUTONOMY AND PROBABLY UNWILLING DO MUCH MORE THAN JAW-BONE. THEIR STRONGEST CARD WOULD BE ACT PASSIVELY SHOULD GNZ DEREGISTER WELLINGTON BRANCH.

4. FREEZING INDUSTRY EMPLOYERS NOT NOTED FOR EXCESS INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS ABILITY. IN ADDITION INDUSTRY IS SEASONAL AND ATTRACTS LEAST SKILLED OF UNSKILLED WORKERS. SEASONALITY PLUS NEED TO FILL EXPORT ORDER HAS USUALLY CAUSED COMPANIES TO CAVE IN TO UNION DEMANDS FOLLOWING SHORT WORK STOPPAGES. HOWEVER ORDERS FOR MUTTON (WHICH MAKES UP BULK OF PRESENT KILL) VERY LOW AND COMPANIES HAVE LITTLE INCENTIVE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TO RESOLVE DISPUTES MERELY TO FILL UP STORGAGE SPACE. THIS FACTOR PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT IN WHAT APPEARS TO BE MANAGEMENT DECISION FORCE A SHOWDOWN WITH UNIONS. THREE PLANTS THAT WERE WORKING EARLY WEEK MARCH 25 DECIDED TO CLOSE DOWN IN SUPPORT OF GEAR. FOLLOWING AGREEMENT REACHED MARCH 28 ALL PLANTS IN OPERATION APRIL 1.

5. COMMENT-WERE IT NOT FOR LONG TERM POLITICAL/
ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE TENDENCY WOULD BE TO PASS
OVER FREEZING WORKS DISPUTES AS BEING MERELY
INDUSTRY ROUTINE. HOWEVER, WILLINGNESS THREE
COMPANIES TO LOCK OUT IS SUPPORT OF FOURTH IS PRAC-
TICALLY UNHEARD OF. SOLIDARITY STEMS FROM LACK OF
SALES ORDERS AND FROM FEAR THAT FREEZING WORKERS
IN GENERAL, AND MIDDLEMASS IN PARTICULAR, ARE
GROWING TOO STRONG. COMPANIES CAN TAKE LITTLE
COMFORT FROM MARCH 28 AGREEMENT AS MIDDLEMASS ONLY
AGREED TO ABIDE BY HIS PREVIOUS AGREEMENTS. WE
EXPECT HIM TO KEEP THIS AGREEMENT ONLY AS LONG AS
IT SUITS HIM. THE NEXT CONFRONTATION WILL PROBABLY
SEE BOTH LABOR AND MANGEMENT TAKING STRONGER
STANDS. THE FOL SEEMS POWERLESS TO INTERVENE IN
ANY DISPUTE AND GNZ IS UNLIKELY RESOLVE ISSUES
SIMPLY BY USE ITS GOOD OFFICES. IN SUCH A SITUATION
STAGE WOULD BE SET FOR MAJOR SHOWDOWN, OUTCOME OF
WHICH NOT AT ALL CLEAR.
WOOD

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